

TRUE PATRIOTISM.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN STAMFORD, UPPER CANADA,

ON THE 3d DAY OF JUNE, 1814,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED BY

HIS HONOR THE PRESIDENT, &c. &c. &c.

OF UPPER CANADA,

FOR A

PROVINCIAL THANKSGIVING.

BY THE REV. JOHN BURNS.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.]

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PROVERBS, XXIV. 21.

MY SON, FEAR THOU THE LORD AND THE KING ; AND MEDDLE NOT
WITH THEM THAT ARE GIVEN TO CHANGE.

WHEN a daring spirit of anarchy, and confusion seems to prevail through the world, it becomes the duty of every man, whose situation in life gives him the opportunity, to inculcate the lessons of obedience and subordination, contained in the words of the text ; and to endeavor to extinguish that torch of sedition, which in the hands of a few misguided zealots is ready to scatter fire and devastation through the land.

I need not tell you that the book of Proverbs, from which these words were taken, was penned by that excellent spirit of wisdom which descendeth from above ; and is therefore deserving of our highest attention. And indeed were we ignorant of this circumstance, the various precepts it contains, would sufficiently recommend themselves to our esteem ; by their intrinsic worth and importance, being grounded on unquestionable truth, expressed in very intelligible language ; and by their sententious brevity, easy to be retained. We are not, however, vainly to imagine, that all the precepts there delivered are to be understood in a rigorous strictness of speech, or in the utmost severity of construction. We are rather to interpret them according to that equitable consideration of circumstances and times, which every general proposition requires ; which, though generally true and fitting, will always admit of some exceptions. Thus for example, when the wise king tells us, " train up a child in the way he should go, and,

when he is old, he will not depart from it ;" we can have no doubt of the general truth and propriety of the precept. But should we from thence conclude, that no child, who has been well educated, ever deviates from the good way, in which he has been trained ; we should only expose ourselves to ridicule, by contradicting the experience of all ages. For, though the greater part of those who fall under the just punishment of the law, owe their ruin to a neglected or vicious education ; yet there are too many also amongst them, the unhappy offspring of virtuous, and honest parents, whom no precepts of wisdom could controul, whom no influence of example could sway, whom no restraints of parental authority could guard from destruction : and, with the same equitable construction, we are to understand that precept in the text, which forbids us to meddle with them that are given to change. For, though there can be no doubt that a meddling and contentious spirit, which is ever hunting after imaginary grievances and causes of discontent, is highly to be condemned, and avoided ; yet, on the other hand, there are occasions, where change becomes necessary, and where the first principles of nature, and of society, and of reason, call upon us to meddle with them that are given to change ; and in the same qualified sense also, are we to understand the precept, here delivered, of fearing the king. Fear is in itself the most ignoble passion, that inhabits the human breast. If we consider its origin, it is ever the child of guilt, and disobedience ; for when man came from the hands of his Maker, pure and unspotted, he was fearless, because he was innocent, but no sooner had he lost that innocence, than fear succeeded ; " I heard thy voice," said our unhappy first pa-

rent to his offended God, "and was afraid." If, therefore, our fear of the king should originate in conscious guilt, or the dread of impending evil, it would be slavish and abject; and, therefore we can never suppose it to be recommended to us by the pen of inspired wisdom, and, indeed, who would wish to instil into the breasts of their subjects, such a fear as this? except such monsters in human shape, as a Tiberius or a Caligula, who could willingly be content to be hated, so long as they were feared. But, the fear, here recommended, is a filial sense of love and duty; which will lead us to show our reverence to the king, by a strict obedience to his laws, and by a just respect to his person and government. In one word, it is what the apostle Peter means, when he commands us "to fear God, and honor the king." Having thus cleared the words of the text, from those inconvenient consequences, which would follow from too strict and rigorous an interpretation of them; I shall proceed to lay before you.

1st Why we should fear God;

2d The duty of honouring the King; and

3d The danger of meddling with such as are given to change.

I am then 1st to inquire why we should fear God: Before however I proceed to this part of my subject, it may be necessary to remark, that it is common in scripture to describe religion in general by some particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made use of for this purpose, as in that passage, "There shall be no want to them that fear him." It may, therefore, signify those, who have a sincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have chosen him as their portion and hope; those, who desire and deserve to be distinguished from the

profane despiser, the secure formalist, or the disguised hypocrite? Those in a word, who are, and who desire to appear, to us in the strong language of scripture, "upon the Lord's side" in every struggle, and who resolve, with Joshua, that whatever others do, for their part they will serve the Lord. But I cannot help thinking, we may also with great safety explain the words in a closer and stricter sense; and suppose, that, by fearing God, is to be understood a due reverence for his infinite majesty, a humble veneration for his sacred authority. This is a most excellent fence or guard to the conscience in an evil time, and a noble preservative from the spreading infection and insinuating poison of prevailing or fashionable sins. It is the usual character of a dissolute age to have cast off fear, to treat the most sacred things with scorn, and to look upon that holy solicitude to avoid sin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanness or weakness of mind, in such an age, one who fears God is well described by the Prophet Isaiah. "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

It is now my business, under this head to mention some of the many reasons, why we should be particularly attentive to this duty; and let it suffice, briefly, to touch upon the four following at present.

1st It is an excellent guard against the commission of sin, that sin which constitutes our depravity, and which is the fruitful source of all our misery. This appears, at first sight, from what has been said of its nature. Can the man knowingly and deliberately sin against God, who has a suitable sense of his being, his perfections, his character,

and his government upon his spirit? No, the very idea of his being under the immediate eye of that God, who is a solemn witness to all his transactions; a holy and a just God, to whom he must shortly give an account of all the deeds done in the body; would check his career and deter him from sin. Think you, my brethren, that the debauchee who gives himself up to idleness and profane company; who wastes whole days, and it may be nights, in the tavern, at the gaming table, or in places of a still more infamous character, that he can have the fear of God before his eyes? Verily no, it is because he is destitute of this principle, that the sinner restrains prayer before God; that he dares to take his sacred name, in a profane manner, in his unhallowed lips; that he dares to get drunk; commit uncleanness; lie; profane the sabbath of the Lord; steal; or otherwise defraud his neighbour. The fear of the Lord would effectually engage him to forsake these and all other vicious courses. It would strip temptation of its charms and disarm it of its forces. Hence the fear of the Lord, and departing from evil, are used as phrases of the same import. "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." And we read, "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil," and, "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." This is the sense, in which the fear of the Lord is clear, enduring forever. It not only deters us from sin, and guards us against it; but, as has been already suggested, it excites and stimulates us to study a thorough conformity in heart to the approving will of God. Hence the apostle exhorts us, "to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

2d. It greatly assists us in the right performance of duty. I mean here the duties we owe more immediately to the most high God. These, my brethren, are numerous and important. They are secret, private and public. They are to be performed in the closet, the family, and the sanctuary ; nor is it possible for us to be the true disciples of Christ, without a conscientious attendance upon them. And you will further please to observe, God justly requires they should be performed in a humble and devout, a spiritual and sincere manner. This our Lord teaches us with great care : " God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit, and in truth." But to all this, the fear of the Lord, as already described, greatly contributes. For in proportion as this fear or reverence towards God prevails in us, will the heart be fixed upon him, the glorious object of our worship, in every duty. In proportion hereto, we shall be guarded against those vain and wandering thoughts that eat out the very soul of our duties, and degrade them into empty formality. God requires, with great solemnity, " my son, give me thine heart." A precept that particularly binds us in this case of duty ; for our God looketh at the heart principally in all our approaches to him ; and indeed he has a special respect to it in all our conduct. Again, it greatly tends to invigorate the graces of the spirit in the soul, and to call them forth into lively exercise. The more this fear of God governs the man, the more active and vigorous will his graces be. For the same views of the perfections, character and christ of God, that are the source of the one, will promote the other. Our time does not admit of shewing you here how this is effected. It must suffice at present to ob-

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serve, that so it is ; and you will easily perceive how a spirit of devotion is hereby promoted. For the proper exercise of faith, hope, and love to God, and delight in him in duty, is that in which the spirit consists. But the more this is in exercise, the more easy, delightful and spiritual will our duties be.

3d. This fear of God, excites us to the important duty of watchfulness, and greatly assists therein. There is no duty of the christian life more frequently and strongly enjoined in the sacred oracles than this. You hear our Lord say, " watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." And again ; " and what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch." To this purpose are the words of the Apostle. " Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Continue in prayers, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." To which accords his exhortation to Timothy : " But watch thou in all things." And did our time admit of considering here the many snares to which God's own people are exposed in this life ; snares that arise from the temptation of Satan, the allurements of the world, and the depraved tempers and passions of the human heart, you would easily perceive the utility, importance and necessity of this duty. There are none of all the duties of the christian life, that have a more immediate and powerful influence on the peace of our own minds, or our conformity to God. It must therefore be a singular favour to be properly excited to it, and assisted in the exercise of it. But this is the office of that fear of God which our text enjoins, as appears from what has been said of its nature. For the man who fears God in the manner explained, will not only watch against every kind of sin, but also

those circumstances of temptation that lead to it.

4th. God recommends this duty to our study and practice, by his divine authority. This he does by the high encomiums he bestows on it, and that with this express view. It is wisdom, it is understanding. Thus in Job : " Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." And in Proverbs : " the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ;" or as the Hebrew word will well admit of being rendered, it is the principal, or grand constituent part of true knowledge. And again, " the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ; and the knowledge of the holy, is understanding." The fear of the Lord is strong confidence ; and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." Add to all this, the duty before us is matter of express command, as in our text, fear God.

Secondly, after this necessary fear of God, the wise Author of my text recommends the duty of fearing, or honouring the King.

And for the performance of this duty, however little, at present, regarded, among the numerous demagogues, who are daily starting out of the prolific soil of faction, many and cogent reasons may be assigned.

1st. **KINGS** are **GOD's** deputies, or vicegerents, here upon earth. They derive their power from him, and are the instruments, which his providence has made choice of, to govern and protect the world in peace and quietness. And this was not only clearly allowed by Christ and his Apostles, in their doctrines, but was also fully confirmed by their own practice and demeanour. Thus, when

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the tribute money was brought to our Saviour ; let the rights of Cæsar be what they would, he clearly determines that it is a duty to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Nor is there a single word in the writings of the Apostles, which tends either to the questioning, or limitation of the powers in being, for sunk and debased as those powers were, the disciples of Christ considered them as ordained of God ; and therefore, in all things lawful and honest, shewed a ready and willing obedience to them, without pretending to dispute, controul, or subvert their authority. And in their doctrines, instead of investigating the origin of government, or defining the prerogative of princes, or stating the pretended unalienable rights of individuals ; the novel language of modern days, they exhort men in the strongest terms, to obey such as have the rule over them ; " to submit to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake : to pray for Kings, and all that are in authority." And both the Apostles, Peter and Paul, threaten such as despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities, with some heavy judgement, which our translators render by the severe word damnation. And indeed the very heathens themselves, so clearly saw the necessity of supporting the dignity of imperial characters, that we find the Romans constantly stiling their magistrates sacred ; that so having as it were, the name and character of God upon them, the people might reverence their persons, and venerate their office. Nor was this wise and salutary idea removed, till the violence of tribunicial phrenzy levelled all distinctions, and converted the mildness of a dutiful and submissive people, into the savage fury of a wild and ungovernable monster.

ed. We are bound by every principle of gratitude, to honour Kings, both on account of the troubles they undergo in the necessary administration of government, and also in respect of the benefits accruing to us from their care and attention. There are I believe, few crowns, which are not, like that of our great master, plated with throns : I mean that every prince who pays a due regard to the duties of his station, is in a state of continual anxiety. The redress of growing grievances must spring from his paternal foresight and affection. The mistakes or miscarriages of his ministers, wound his reputation, and what is still more aggravating, the wisdom of the prince is too often unjustly traduced for the people's folly, which will not suffer him to pursue the necessary measures for the surport of his dignity, and the safety of his kingdom, so that what the Roman analist said of war, may not unfitly be applied to government. " This is the hard and unjust condition of war ; every one lays claim to a share of its prosperous events : its miscarriages are imputed to one alone." Again, the height of a prince's situation sets him above all the dearest pleasures of society and friendship, and in their place substitutes all the forms and impertinence of ceremonial restraint: he can neither sit down without care, nor walk abroad without trouble : so that he is certainly less to be envied for the pageantry which accompanies him, than to be pitied for the hardships it brings with it. And, therefore, if Kings, for the sake of public advantage, and the security of individuals, will subject themselves to these inconveniences, it is certainly the duty of subjects, in return, to pay every reasonable acknowledgement of gratitude, and respect towards them. And this first, by reverencing their persons and government. It has been too

much the fashion of the present times to rail at superiors and to speak evil of such things as we do not understand, and which in fact do not belong to us if we did. But men would do well to remember that tho' this may for a time, answer the purposes of party, by distressing those to whom the public welfare is intrusted, yet it is ever attended with the greatest danger to all, by obliterating those ideas of subordination from the minds of the populace, without which no society can long subsist. For it should always be remembered, that the madness of the people, when once excited, becomes like the raging of the waves, fierce and uncontrolable, and has not unfrequently, overwhelmed those very persons, who have been the most forward in exciting it. However, therefore, we may differ in opinion from those who govern, we ought to be extremely cautious of expressing any disrespect for their persons, or of weakening the operations of their government, by an incautious or intemperate censure of its measures.

3d. We ought to shew our respect to the King by a ready obedience to his laws. To obey, we are told in holy writ, is better than sacrifice, and to harken, than the fat of rams. And if this be the care even of King's themselves, in relation to God, who in that respect are no other than subjects to the King of Kings, it cannot be otherwise with us who are their subjects. And whatever men may pretend under the specious names of patriotism or public good, it is as great a solecism in politics, for a man to call himself a good subject, who lives in contempt and defiance of the laws of his country, as it is in religion, for a man to call himself a good christian, who lives in direct contradiction to the laws of God. Such a mask is too thin to deceive any but the credulous and unthink-

ing vulgar, and will never impose on those who in political as well as religious matters, think it the wisest and safest way not to give credit to every pretender to superior excellence, on his own word, but rather to judge of the tree by its fruits.

Lastly, we ought to shew our respect to the King but not meddling with those who are given to change. The necessary qualifications which some politicians have required in a leader of faction, are much eloquence and little understanding: much eloquence to persuade and mislead others, but not understanding enough to foresee the dangers arising from his own conduct, lest he should be discouraged from his ruinous enterprizes. And men of these qualifications are to be found in every state, who under pretence of redressing imaginary grievances, or of reforming abuses, which never existed, are ever ready to turn the world upside down. But before men give way to their insidious harangues, they would do well to consider, what the experience of all ages will teach them, that; however specious the pretences of such demagogues may be, self interest generally lie at the bottom of all they do, or say; that, however some grievances may and must exist, even in the best and wisest civil constitutions, yet that an imperfect administration is preferable to that anarchy and violence, which always follows the subversion of legal and settled government, and lastly, that however the powers of government may change hands, yet that the people are seldom gainers by the change. And should any man doubt the truth of these positions, we need only refer him to the consideration of those unhappy times in Great Britain, when regal authority was abolished, and the powers of government usurped by factious disturbers or canting zealots; or again, to those successive re-

volutions in the Roman state, by which the governing powers were transferred, in turns, to Kings, consuls, tribunes, triumverates, decemvirates, and emperors, and in each of which the people, ever shifting, ever restless, gained only an accumulated load of misery and oppression. If indeed our constitutional liberties were taken from us, if we were forcibly desseized of our property, if the laws were trampled under foot, and the iron hand of power, or the wide stretched grasp of prerogative, were ready to snatch away our sacred claims or chartered rights, we might then justly complain, and think it time to look for expedients and defenders. But the reverse of all these things is true ; and for a striking proof of this, I need only appeal singly to the impartiality with which justice is administered to all ranks of people, by men of learning and talents, and now happily independent of the will of the crown ; to convince every reasonable man that he is a free member of the most mild, wise, and equitable government in the world, which therefore it is his interest as well as his duty to support by every mark of cheerful obedience in himself, and by discouraging every factious innovation in others. Let therefore, past experience teach us wisdom ; and whilst we set every man under his own vine, and under his own fig tree, let us fear God, and honour the King. Let us study to be great, without pretending to interfere in things which no way belong to us, and without meddling with those that are given to change.

We are assembled here this day, to return our thanks to the Almighty God, for the many unmerited acts of kindness which he hath shewed unto us. By the Providence of God, we have been delivered in several instances from our enemies.

All their schemes for our subjugation, have as yet proved abortive. Let us then be thankful, and acknowledge the Providence of God, which watches over the fate of nations, and which has preserved this Province in the most perilous and critical circumstances. Does not this then afford some ground to hope, that if we by the grace of God, endeavour to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will be once more extended to us, and that by a speedy and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove or lighten those heavy judgements, which our iniquities have now most justly drawn down upon us. What may be in the councils of the Most High ; what mighty changes he may be now meditating in the system of human affairs, he alone can tell. But in the midst of this awful suspense, while the fate of empires hangs trembling on his resolves, of one thing at least we are absolutely certain ; that it is better to have him for our friend than our enemy. If by our infidelity, our impiety, our libertinism, our disregard to the Lord's day, our inattention to family worship, and neglect of secret prayers, our ill timed gaiety, and wanton profuseness in the very face of public distress, we audaciously insult his admonitions, and brave his utmost vengeance ; what else can we expect, but that every thing which ought naturally to be the means of our stability, will be converted into instruments of our destruction ? But if on the contrary, by reverencing the judgements of God, and returning to that allegiance which we owe him, we again put ourselves under his protection, he may still as he has often done, dispel the clouds that hang over us : or if for wise reasons, he suffer them to gather and darken upon us, he may make even this, in the final result, conduce to our

real welfare. Let, then, all the wise and the good in every party and denomination of men among us (for they are in every one to be found) stand forth in the present exigency as one man, to assist and befriend their country, and as the Roman triumphers, gave up each his friend for the *destruction* of the state, let every one now give up his favorite prejudices, systems, interests, resentments, and connections for the *preservation* of it. Our safety cometh from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth. If he be for us we need not apprehend what man can do, if he go not forth with the host against our enemies, the arm of our countrymen will be powerless in battle and their hearts will fail them for fear.

Girding on our harness in humble hope of divine aid, and displaying our banners in the name of the Lord, let the means he hath put into our hands be vigorously exerted. As we are now addressing you who have the prospect of being called to the high places of the field, we would borrow the exhortation of Nehemiah in similar circumstances: "Be not afraid of them, remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Never a General at the head of an army, and on the eve of engagement, made a more impressive speech. It comprises every thing. Nehemiah knew the way to the heart. The considerations which he suggests, would inspire cowardice with valour. Brother is an endearing name. In the hour of common danger, all its tenderness is felt, and to sacrifice life in a brother's defence is at once the impulse of nature, and the precept of the Bible. But "your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses," shall the inheri-

tances of thy father, or the hard earned fruit of thine honest labour, become a robber's booty, and shall the babe that now smiles in thy face, and calls thee father, spill his blood on a murderer's sword? Shall she whom thou hast pledged thine oath to cherish, and defend become a ruffian's prey? To him who unaffected by considerations like these, shrinks from danger, we wish no worse, than that he may live to witness his own dishonour, and find at last a coward's grave.

But above all, let your courage be founded on religion. "Remember the Lord who is great and terrible." Courage separated from piety is not courage but madness. It may be directed by providence to promote the cause in which it is exerted; but should the warrior fall, we tremble at his fate. Were we to describe the complete hero, we would give him not only that patriotism and that imperious sense of duty before which danger vanishes, but that reverential fear of his God, which excludes from the heart every other fear,—that testimony of a good conscience, which strips death of his terrors,—that faith which looks to a brighter recompence than sovereigns can bestow. Such a warrior might fall, but he would fall in glory; and were the drops of heaven the only tears that bedewed his head, his immortal spirit is safe with his redeemer in paradise. We are anxious my brethren for your honour as soldiers, but allow us to be equally concerned for your salvation as men. Be ye reconciled to God, then march as native valour prompts you to the cannon's mouth, or enter first the deadly breach, you are independent of every event that can befall you.

But all are not soldiers; we trust were it necessary, the greatest number would have the will, and should such a necessity occur our exhortation

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would be,—“let him who hath no sword sell his garment, and buy one.” With respect to those who discover a backwardness to defend their country by every means in their power, when she is in danger, I would say, “they have not the fear of God before their eyes.” With regard to such I may well apply these words; “curse ye Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they come not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” But though not called to gird on our harness, and aid our country in the field, still each can contribute his share in her defence. Our iniquity as a Province is great, and as we have more to fear from the displeasure of heaven, than from any earthly foe. While we humble ourselves in the sight of God, and penitently confess our guilt, let each of us exert his endeavours to put a stop to its progress, and, as the most effectual mode of procedure, let reformation begin at home. Let every man know the plague of his own heart, lay aside the sin that most easily besets him, and ease the public burden by repentance for his personal offences. Let us rend our hearts and not our garments, nor imagine that while we hang down our heads like a bullrush and assume the external appearance of humiliation, that this is pleasing to God. Let us remember that he looketh upon the heart. Let us hear and obey his voice, saying “wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well.” His judgements are abroad in the earth, let them teach us righteousness, and when the host is going forth against our enemies, let us keep ourselves from every wicked thing. Then shall the blessing of heaven descend upon the delibera-

tions of those who sit in council, and upon the exertions of those who turn the battle to the gate. Then shall they who are girding on this harness in the best of causes, put it off with honour, having secured the peace, the independence, the glory of their country. May God grant it, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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